

Homage to Gertrude

i.

I am upstairs deciding which of my two selves to be and not feeling like being anyone today and thinking about Gertrude Stein and her new way to write and how Alice didn't have enough money at the end and how its funny to live two lives that are not one life and maybe there can be a new way for that too. Once a while ago there was a young old fashioned married couple and she was very shy and he was very ardent and she was prim and proper and wore her dresses up to her neck and never let her husband see her undressed and he was always begging for a kiss and she was always blushing and saying stop your foolishness you're getting in my way while she was in the kitchen with flour on her arms up to her elbows and her apron over the dress which came up to her neck and in the sink was the pump handle pump and in the barn were two horses and six cows and the nearest neighbor was two miles down the road. Sometimes she would get really angry when she was working and he would try to play and her mouth grew into a thin straight line and her nose got sharp and she looked bony but when they went to bed she was plump and juicy and her mouth was soft and asking for kisses and her other mouth trembled with delight and her husband never knew what to think in the light he had one wife and in the night he had another and the one who cooked his meals frowned at him and the one in bed smiled in the dark and he was puzzled and wanted to see what she looked like in the dark without her thin mouth and sharp nose so one night when they were making love he reached over to the floor and lit a match and she was startled and he watched her face go from wet to dry and the frown came and he burned his fingers and she wouldn't make love any more that night and I don't know whether she ever felt so free in the dark again or whether she began bringing the frown to bed or whether she woke up later that night and laughed and got up in the morning and took her smile into the kitchen. He felt frightened like he had given her all the power and now maybe he had spoiled his great dark pleasure forever I don't know how it turned out and Alice is dead now after she finished out her unaccustomed poor style life I wonder if Gertrude was there to greet her and how it was with them.

ii

Sometimes I am tired and decide I must give up something and the other voice says don't quit and the first one says it's not fun any more and the second says don't give up just because you can't hear the music don't you

know the brass band is only for sendoffs and sometimes for welcome home and after all you chose these two lives no one is forcing you but it would be comfy to let one go but if one dies the other one carries the corpse and it may look like life but it is really like Siamese twins when one dies the other must go too so I am a Siamese twins trying to stay alive and thinking about pioneers and how it was when men and women walked west from the Missouri River beside their carts to choose the land. And the women chose the men and the men chose the land. There was one woman who started to Seattle proud beside her husband in a new calico dress standing tall and feeling the fabric stretch over her breasts as they walked away from home and she saw him die half way there from an Indian arrow and she was a drain on the rest until she found another man and there were women who lived under the wind in the sod houses with greased paper for windows that let in too much cold and let out not enough smoke and with husbands too tired and strained to speak or care and there were women who cried and whose husbands wished they had left them home and others who could smile as they helped with the heavy work of plowing and digging out the stubborn roots and there were women in the Donner Pass who froze to death after they had eaten the flesh of those who died first and there was a woman who went crazy living alone with her man and listening to the surf off of Point Conception and there was a San Francisco woman named Alice who went to Paris to be with Gertrude who was a pioneer and maybe they can hear the music now.

-- Eleanor B. Zimmerman

Calabasas, Calif.

Williams' Wheelbarrow

So much depended
upon

his white physician's
hands

purified with Paterson
rain

even a red wheel
barrow.